

Road problems

Haggerty draws a lot of talk, but no action

By Louise Okrutsky
Staff writer

The Lakes Chamber and West Bloomfield Chamber of Commerce luncheon to discuss traffic tieups on Haggerty Road resembled what critics have said is the problem with getting the area repaired — all talk and no go.

In this case, Michigan Department of Transportation director James Pitz was given a chance to do most of the talking. State Sen. Richard Fessler, R-West Bloomfield, a featured speaker at the luncheon, didn't go.

Rick Simonson, Fessler's press secretary, said that the state senator who has made Haggerty improvement a pet project, thought the meeting was to be the following Wednesday.

"It was a scheduling oversight. He wanted to be there to talk to them," Simonson said.

As he had said earlier, Pitz wouldn't reveal all the details of proposals to solve Haggerty's problems until those plans are unveiled next month. He did discuss broad plans

for the state's roadways during the next decade.

THE HAGGERTY corridor from I-696 to M-59 is set as a top priority road project for this period. The road is among the expansion projects for which the transportation department has earmarked \$600 million during the next 10 years, according to Pitz. But expanding the state's network of roads ranks third in the department of transportation's priorities.

The top priority of the department during the next decade is to preserve the existing 9,000 miles of state roadway.

"We haven't been doing that in the state," Pitz said.

During the next 10 years, \$2.5 billion is expected to be spent on preserving existing state roads.

Next in priority is the completion of the interstate highway system in Michigan, I-696 and I-69. About \$500 million, much of it federal money, will be poured into finishing the interstate projects, Pitz said.

THIS YEAR, \$40 million in federal

aid funds was allocated to Oakland County to accelerate work on I-696. That meant Oakland County received \$118 million in road money, compared to the \$65 million it received last year in state trunk-line funds, Pitz said.

As for the Haggerty Road problem, Fessler and Pitz would like to see the project divided into two parts. There would be an immediate focus on six miles that span Farmington Hills and West Bloomfield from 12 Mile to Richardson Road, south of Daypointe Country Club.

Both men say the approach makes more sense than tackling the entire stretch from I-696 to M-59. "It would give us a major step forward on Haggerty Road," Pitz said.

As a maneuver to get federal funding for the project, consideration is given to Haggerty as it runs between the state and federal highways. Then the road can become a state trunkline, fair game for federal funding. It's expected that 80-90 percent of the money for the project

will be come from the federal government, according to Simonson. He expects the cost to come in the neighborhood of \$36 million.

The same approach was used to pay for improvements to Rochester Road in Troy and Orchard Lake Road in Farmington Hills. Those projects, too, were undertaken because they weren't built to accommodate the higher levels of traffic brought about by the county's expansion.

THAT SITUATION isn't limited to Oakland County.

"We haven't been in the situation long enough to do anything more than react to emergencies since the 1960s," said Pitz, who was brought in as MDOT director by Gov. James Blanchard four years ago.

Construction would first focus on providing an exit ramp off of I-696 onto Haggerty. Property for the ramp is already owned by the state, according to Simonson. The site is west of Haggerty, south of 12 Mile, more than one mile east of 12 Oaks Mall, Novi.

Haggerty itself could be broadened into a boulevard, according to both Fessler and Pitz. Fessler has gone as far as to propose a tree-lined boulevard.

"My opinion is that we're not going to be able to locate a freeway in this area," Pitz said.

BESIDES BEING financially unfeasible, a freeway has been declared to be environmentally unsound for the area, Pitz said.

Simonson concurs. About 12 years ago, when it was proposed that Haggerty become part of the now moribund M-275, the project was declared hazardous to the environment since the area is above the headwaters of the Huron River, according to Simonson. But Pitz sees a boulevard as a realistic option.

"It's easier to maintain than a freeway with its lower speeds." A six-lane boulevard may be able to handle Haggerty's traffic, he said.

Any work on Haggerty will be preceded by a study of the corridor's traffic congestion problems set to begin in January.

When audience members grumbled they were tired of studies that seemed to lead to nothing but more

studies, Pitz countered, "Studies are a reality. They are required by federal and state law."

IN LAKE country where people like to joke that water skiing supersedes automobile use in the summer, Haggerty doesn't raise too many laughs. Some would like to see the state use the old studies to come up with a solution for the traffic problems on the two-lane road that handles up to 20,000 a day.

"Within the next five years, we expect 30,000 vehicles per day," Simonson said. Currently, Telegraph Road handles 40,000 cars.

"If we take old studies and tried road development from there, we'd be in deep, deep trouble. There's been a lot of land development in the county," Pitz said.

Twelve years ago, the threat of growth was used in part to reject the M-275 project. At that time, the Miliken administration thought the freeway would encourage even more movement into the northwestern suburbs, according to Simonson.

"They thought the growth would be too excessive to be shouldered by the area. But the growth has come even without the road."

Residents share Hills leaders' road concerns

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look at our project list. We'll re-evaluate it and update it if we feel some of the projects are feasible."

Whether survey results will change administrators' project listings is uncertain at this point. City officials are attempting to tackle road problems that are a citywide problem, rather than a problem for particular areas or neighborhoods, Call said.

Administrators have developed a \$14 million three-year program designed to improve the city's major roads whose congestion and deterioration has been accompanied by a residential and commercial construction boom.

THE FARMINGTON Hills City Council showed its support of administrators' three-year program in June by levying a 1-mill tax increase devoted entirely for road improvements. The city's financial share of

projects proposed during the three-year period is \$9 million.

City officials expect that non-city costs will be paid for by the Oakland County Road Commission, other communities, such as Farmington, Novi and West Bloomfield Township, which share roads scheduled for improvements, and some highway grants.

In 1986-87, the 1 mill levied by the council for roads will generate \$1.2 million that will be combined with \$750,000 in the city's existing major road budget for a total of \$2 million. The \$2 million will finance the city's share of projects scheduled for 1986-87. That will leave \$7 million of the road program still to be financed.

Although city officials could pay for Farmington Hills' \$9 million share of improvements on a pay-as-you-go basis, it would take about seven years to complete all proposed projects with an annual 1-mill levy.

The financing method city officials are hoping to use includes pay-

ing for improvements in the first year with the \$2 million and asking voters in September to support a \$7 million general obligation bond issue to pay for the remaining two years of the program.

ROADS THAT residents consider in greatest need of improvement include:

- Drake Road, 11 to 12 Mile.
- M-102 and Grand River intersection.
- Drake Road, 13 to 14 Mile.
- 13 Mile, Haggerty to Drake; Farmington to Orchard Lake roads; Haggerty to Halsted, Orchard Lake Road to Middlebelt and Middlebelt to Inkster.
- Fourteen Mile, Farmington to Orchard Lake roads.

MANY OF these roads are included as priority projects in the city's three-year improvement program. Other road improvements suggested by residents will be evaluated to

determine whether they should be included in the city's improvement program.

"It's difficult to say what impact it will have on the projects proposed now," Call said. "We want to look at projects citywide, not just for one area."

But survey results also showed that residents are as equally concerned about major roads under Oakland County Road Commission jurisdiction as they are about local roads. Middlebelt, especially between 9 and 10 Mile, Orchard Lake Road and 12 Mile were listed as roads in need of improvement.

Although city officials wanted to avoid emphasizing county roads, survey results showed that major thoroughfares are of great concern and require county attention. "We think they have to be responsible to the citizens of the city of Farmington Hills as much as we do," Call said.

Survey results regarding county roads lend credibility and support to the city's plea for improvements on

the major thoroughfares, Call said. The same holds true for city efforts with state transportation officials. Survey results also show that residents want improvements on state-owned roads such as Haggerty and Northwestern Highway.

"The bond issue will also give leverage in working with the state and county," Call said.

WHILE PASSAGE of the bond issue would provide the city with a financing mechanism for local road improvements, money would also be available for the city to participate in state and federal matching grant programs. Matching grants allow the city to complete necessary projects with the help of state and federal money, Call said.

City engineering staff analyzed survey results — particularly residents' comments about traffic concerns other than road conditions — that will be given to the traffic engineer for study, said Dale Countegnan, assistant to the director of public

services.

"We got good comments. There are problems with signs, signals, for example, that will be useful in the next few years in analyzing these kinds of needs," Call said.

Residents also listed I-696 as a concern, particularly congestion on the interstate. But plans are in the works to add two lanes in each direction by 1989-90 so traffic flow will ease onto the interstate just south of Telegraph when the I-696 east-west extension is completed, Call said.

Survey results also showed that 55 percent (1,913) of the respondents are aware of the city's bond issue scheduled for the ballot in September. Forty-five percent (1,541) said they were unaware of the ballot question.

Although city officials have not scheduled meetings to discuss the road program or bond issue with civic groups or homeowners associations, information will be available to such groups and individuals if requested, Call said.

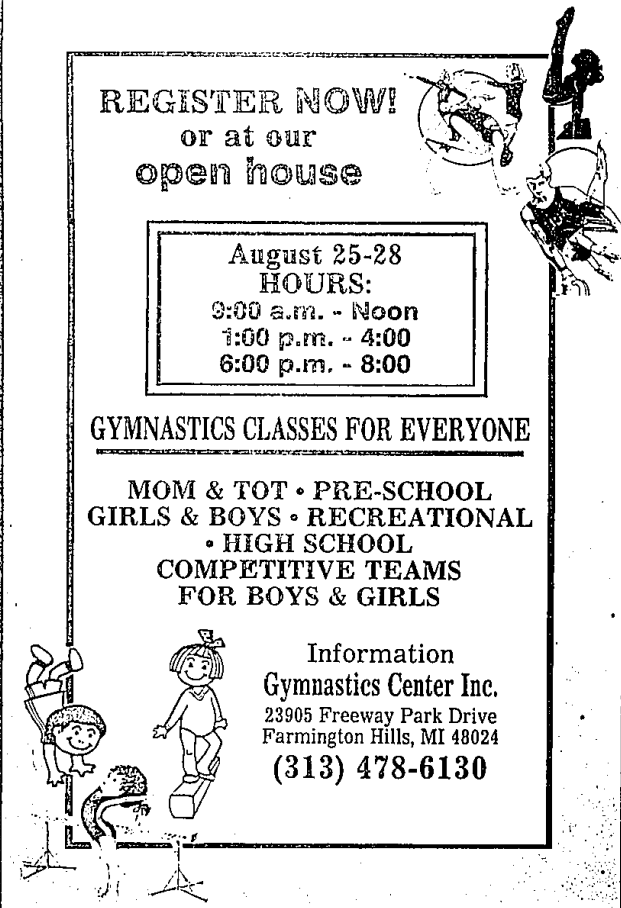
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